

where only one such violator has been pursued. Even the President's Import Safety Working Group has recommended this change.

Last, S. 2045 provides important protections for employees who stand up for public safety by blowing the whistle on unsafe products or practices. These whistleblower protections are extremely important to catching unsafe products before they enter the stream of commerce. Employees are often on the front lines of consumer product safety, and I believe they deserve protection from retribution if they report activities they believe to be in violation of the law. H.R. 4040 does not provide whistleblower protections.

There are many other areas I could highlight where S. 2045 can provide more meaningful reform than H.R. 4040, but I believe these to be some of the most important. I would like my colleagues to know of my commitment for this body to consider and pass meaningful consumer product safety reform next year. I will continue to work tirelessly on this legislation over the holiday recess, and I will continue to work with my colleagues across the aisle to pass bipartisan legislation. I thank them for their hard work during this process and am encouraged with the progress we have made in just the past few days.

Finally, I would like to thank the cosponsors of this legislation for their leadership and persistence on consumer product safety. This has certainly been a team effort, and I look forward to continuing to work with them to resolve this matter when we return.

FEDERAL EXECUTIVE BOARDS

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, I wish to recognize the accomplishments and good work of the Federal Executive Boards, FEBs, across the country. FEBs bring together Federal agencies outside of the Washington, DC metropolitan area to better serve the community.

Federal Executive Boards were established in 10 major regions across the country by President John Kennedy in 1961 as a way for Federal agencies outside of Washington to communicate with each other and address local issues affecting the Federal employee community. Since then, they have grown to include 28 metropolitan areas and serve hundreds of thousands of Federal employees.

The boards are made up of senior officials from each Federal agency in a given geographic region. They are quasi-agencies that receive voluntary funding from local Federal agencies in the region. They operate with a lean structure of one or two staff members who create partnerships between the Federal, State, and local governments to achieve common goals. FEBs also offer training workshops, coordinate preparedness exercises, and disseminate information on office closures.

I am very proud to have a strong and active FEB in Honolulu that serves the Federal agencies in the Pacific.

To this extent, earlier this fall, I held a hearing on the role FEBs can play in preparing Federal communities for a pandemic influenza outbreak. Many public health experts believe that we are overdue for a pandemic outbreak, and the question is not a matter of if, but when. In this effort, I asked the Government Accountability Office to evaluate the work of FEBs in preparing their constituency for a pandemic outbreak. What I found was a lot of dedicated individuals building partnerships and developing procedures to prepare for a public health, natural, or man-made emergency. They are doing important work, but they are operating without a lot of resources.

Because of their natural role in communicating with and coordinating Federal agencies, emergency preparedness and response has become a central component to the mission and activities of FEBs. For example, the Honolulu-Pacific FEB, which serves my home State of Hawaii, is a resource for emergency response plans, pandemic influenza preparedness, and continuity of operations plans.

Similarly, the Minnesota Federal Executive Board has taken to heart the need for better coordination with State, local, and private partners in the event of a pandemic or other emergency, and it has organized a number of emergency training exercises that bring together these partners.

Unfortunately, not all FEBs have the resources or support to be so active. At the hearing earlier this fall, the representatives from the FEBs testified to the instability of their funding and the difficulty in planning events without a known budget. The Executive Directors make do with what they are given, but often that is not much.

The Office of Personnel Management oversees the FEBs and has been working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to develop a strategic plan that would address funding, performance standards, and provide guidance to FEBs on their role in the event of an emergency. OPM is hoping to produce the plan early next year, and I anxiously await its release. The more support we can provide them, the more effective our federal agencies will be.

I would like to commend the work being done by FEBs, especially the Honolulu-Pacific FEB, and I will continue to support their efforts to build a strong Federal community.

ABSENTEE VOTING

Mr. BAYH. Mr. President, I wish to speak about the importance of counting the votes of military personnel and American citizens living abroad. These votes—defined as Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act votes, UOCAVA—are consistently neglected.

According to an Elections Assistance Commission, EAC, report issued in Sep-

tember, less than 17 percent of the estimated 6 million potentially eligible overseas voters sought to participate in the 2006 elections. This concerns me greatly. Further, of the 992,034 requested overseas ballots in 2006, only 333,179 were actually counted—leaving potentially more than 66 percent of overseas voters that wanted to vote in 2006 disenfranchised.

In June, the GAO released a report that urged the EAC, and other Federal agencies, to better serve our UOCAVA voters. I believe that the EAC has an opportunity to rectify this situation now.

The fiscal year 2008 Omnibus appropriations bill includes \$115 million that will be distributed to the States so that they can proceed to implement the Help American Vote Act. All State and local elections officials are aware of the difficulties receiving and counting ballots from overseas military personnel and citizens living abroad. The Department of Defense, through the Federal Voting Assistance Program, continues to struggle with this problem.

The EAC report recommends that states make a great effort to ensure that obstacles to voting experienced by members of the service members and citizens living abroad—including voter registration, ballot receipt, and ballot return—should be reduced, minimized, or eliminated. To this end, several States intend to use HAVA funds to implement plans that will allow them to better serve these severely disenfranchised voters. For these reasons, I urge the EAC to clearly notify interested States that HAVA funds are available to facilitate the voting process for UOCAVA voters. I further urge the EAC to distribute 2008 HAVA funding to those States as soon as possible, so that UOCAVA voters do not remain disenfranchised for the 2008 elections.

TIM JOHNSON INPATIENT REHABILITATION PRESERVATION ACT

Mr. NELSON of Nebraska. Mr. President, I rise today to honor a dear friend and fellow Midwesterner who is close to each of us, South Dakota Senator TIM JOHNSON. After suffering a rare brain hemorrhage last year, Senator JOHNSON had a tall mountain to climb in his recovery. He worked hard and followed a rigorous rehabilitation regimen. The results are obvious. He has had an outstanding recovery—due in large part to his intense determination to get better, the support of his family and friends, and the quality rehabilitation care that he received—and continues to receive. Senator JOHNSON was able to return to the Senate earlier this year. It is a great honor to serve with Senator JOHNSON, and we are all grateful to have him back.

As many know, we recognized Senator JOHNSON's outstanding recovery by renaming S. 543, legislation aimed at preserving access to rehabilitation hospitals the "Tim Johnson Inpatient